

# Three more Stories

Mike (Bcc Family),

I am so glad that you liked the first three stories which I sent you, and have included them in Blackledge Stories. As I shared with you when you first suggested Blackledge Stories, I want to do what I can to facilitate your success on another literary legacy for you and our family. Accordingly, I am working hard and investing a lot of extra time to get each of my story inputs to you in "publication ready" status. I was pleased when Penn & Fred were so complimentary about my first inputs to you, telling me they rarely laughed so hard as they did at my Armadillo and Duck stories. Fred was even kind enough to send me a hand written letter telling me how much he enjoyed them. So I am encouraged to try again with these next three stories ("Blackledge Urban Legends", "From "What The Hell?" to "Hail To The Chief"", "The Perfect Date") with more to come!! Please confirm your receipt of the two pictures which accompany the three stories.

Your bro,  
Pete

## Blackledge Urban Legends (BUL)

After our Mother passed away in 1971 and our Father passed away in 1982, I wanted to somehow memorialize the amazing stories and experiences of our wonderful Blackledge family. Our family has historically had a recurrent connection with the number "eleven", even to the passing of our Father ----- who was eleven years older than our Mother and lived eleven years longer than she. So I developed a list of eleven background stories and eleven legends which I had personally experienced or been told about our family. I then assembled pictures of our family members, sketched out a humorous but relevant way to portray our family in a single group portrait, and tracked down a professional artist to transpose my ideas into a large framed drawing. Here is that professional drawing of "The Blackledge Hutch" and my detailed recounting of the eleven Blackledge Family Background Stories and eleven Blackledge Family Stories which are portrayed in it:

ELEVEN Background Stories:

- 1- We are all dressed in Bunny suits because Mother called us all Bunnies.
- 2- Patti has a box of running shoes because of her accomplishments as a marathon runner. The box has been marked for "Rabbits" rather than "Men" or "Women".
- 3- Penn has a tennis racquet because of her accomplishments as a tennis player
- 4- Dad's bunny suit is monogrammed with "ADB", as he monogrammed many of his shirts with his initials "ADB".
- 5.- Dad is holding a Navy banner, representing his stalwart Navy support
- 6- Dad is holding a "Houston Clubber" magazine because he often took us all to the exclusive "Houston Club" for special dinners ----- Note: A side story was Dad's "bromance" with Tony, the Houston Club piano player. Dad would talk expressively

about seeing Tony working out at the gym and what a great physique Tony had, so Mike & I couldn't stop kidding Dad about that.

7- Mom has a stack of books in her lap because she loved books and was a voracious reader. She reportedly read all of the Harvard Classics.

8- One book Mother is holding is "How To Speak Bostonian" because of her New England background & accent. We grew up hearing about taking a "baahtth".

9- Mom is also holding a book on "Romance Languages" because she loved foreign languages (particularly Romance languages), earning her BA at University of Houston, her MA at Rice University, and then starting her PHD at Rice University (until her first heart attack at age 52) and later teaching French, Spanish, & German at Hartman Junior High and then at Lamar High School (much to my chagrin when I attended Lamar). When Mike & I were growing up, each Summer she would shop Mike & me off to Rio Vista Camp in Kerville, Texas so she could fly to Europe to practice her languages.

10- Another book in Mother's lap is titled "How To Avoid Housework" because she disliked wasting time on housework (Penn said she has inherited that gene), which is the background for the below Legend about our series of household maids.

11- The Monopoly game is in the center, as it was a game which our family (siblings & guests) often gathered around & played together, particularly before evil Television entered our household. (Other games our family played together were Scrabble and Risk).

## **ELEVEN Blackledge Legends:**

1-Mike is holding a glass of milk because in order to get Mike to climb the stairs to his bedroom, a warm glass of this favorite beverage would be placed on the step above him, and moved up each step as Mike would move toward it, calling "Here Mook; Here Mook" .

2- Mike is holding a piece of cheese because he was often called "Michael Mouse." However, at one point, he became "The Mouse Who Roared": Mike had become resentful of his older, domineering sisters ----and finally, having grown big enough to assert his independence, taking one of them and hurling her against the living room sofa. Patti, Penn, & I were all shocked ----- but his big sisters never bothered him again !!! (Patti & Penn have repressed this shocking event, but Mike & I vividly remember it).

3- Patti is holding her box of running shoes: Patti had qualified to run in the Boston Marathon. At one point during that marathon., she ran past "Love Story" author Eric Segal, who was sharing a profane conversation while running beside another

marathon participant. As Patti ran past Eric Segal, she turned to him & said "You talk just like you write !"

4- I am holding a Police Summons for "Peter Blackledge" charged with "Kicking an officer in the shins." When I was in kindergarten at Roberts Elementary School, a girl in my class was crying because she had unfortunately dropped her toy out of the open classroom window. Our classroom was on the first floor, so I decided to be a gentleman and help her by retrieving her toy. So I climbed up & out the open window & jumped down to the soft dirt below, retrieved her toy, and then walked triumphantly back in through the school's front door for my reward (this is one example of why Garrett Paiz reminds me so much of myself!). When I got back in the classroom, I was chagrined to find that the little girl whom I was rescuing had ratted me out to the kindergarten teacher!. So much for gallantry being rewarded!!! Somehow, the story was embellished (probably by Dad, because he would laughingly tell it over & over during the years to follow) to add my having also kicked a cop in the shins when he had come to get me. I don't recall that part of my adventure, but Dad certainly loved telling everyone about it.

5- Penn is hiding a handful of yellow-colored Monopoly money (which we called "cheeses", as they were yellow and were the largest denomination in Monopoly money) behind her back. During one of our highly competitive Monopoly games, there came a point where Penny landed on the high-cost property of another player, & became very outwardly distraught at the prospect of being ousted from play due to her going bankrupt as a result. Penn very dramatically & sorrowfully showed us all her modest remaining Monopoly money, and begged for giving her a major break ----- which we, feeling very sorry for her, uncharacteristically did. Whereupon she subsequently pulled out a large collection of "Cheeses" which she had sneakily hidden away, bought the remaining high-priced Monopoly property, and mercilessly crushed the rest of us players to win the game. (Note: Penn has subsequently become a Christian, so does not like to be reminded of this event from her sordid past. But perhaps it was foretelling her becoming a "Trumpian"? ).

6- Penn is holding her tennis racquet in her left hand. At one point in her California life, Penn started playing competitive tennis. She became very good, beating people of greater and greater skill levels, which required her to advance to higher levels of play competition. Finally, she reached such a high level that the other competitors were so good that Penn could no longer win as she had been. So, to be able to continue winning, she came up with a great solution ---- she switched to playing tennus left handed, which allowed her to start over at the lower skill levels so she could go back to always winning. We Blackledges are not only very competitive, we are also very innovative!!!

7- A classic Thanksgiving legend, retold over & over across the years, was when Dad dropped the carefully prepared Thanksgiving turkey onto the dining room floor. (However, I don't recall that it kept us hungry Blackledges from eating it!).

8.- Mother is holding a book titled "Recognizing Fire Hydrants". Another classic legend: Mother was notoriously near-sighted, but generally refused to wear glasses (was it Blackledge pride?). One day, Dad was driving Mother home during chilly weather. As their car approached our Gramercy Street home, Mother turned to Dad with some alarm in her voice, pointing at the fire hydrant which was located at the intersection of Gramercy Street and Holcomb, and worriedly said to Dad "What's Peter doing running around without his coat on?".

9- As noted in Background, Mother was not an enthusiastic homemaker. However, she loved a challenge & was very good at succeeding at them. At one point, she decided to learn how to cook. So she bought the "Fanny Farmer Cookbook." She started on Page 1 of that cookbook, and went from front to back. However, Mother also worked in projects (e.g., I was her last "Have Children Project"). As Dad would often laughingly tell the story, after each Fanny Farmer Cookbook dish which Mother would serve, Dad would say to her "Missy, that was delicious. When can we have that again?" To which Mother would reply "Never!!! We have finished that dish, and we are moving on." When she reached the end of that Fanny Farmer Cookbook, she (now feeling that she had mastered cooking) closed the book and never again prepared another of its delicacies for us. That ushered in the family's long "Bataan Death March" of dishes which required as little investment of her time and attention as possible ----- resulting in many less edible dishes. After one such experience, Penn complained to Mother "This food is burnt!!!". To which Mother sweetly but steelily replied "No, darling, it's just crisp." Hence the book in Mother's lap entitled "Crisp Cooking."

10-After mastering & moving on from cooking, Mother decided to move on from housekeeping in general. She convinced Dad to hire a maid to do those tasks. This ushered in a series of extraordinary experiences for me and those siblings who had not yet left for Rice or Naval Academy. Our first maid "Bertha", because of her long service in our house, became somewhat like a member of our family. There is even a family picture of Bertha helping Mother put on her college graduation cap and gown. Such inclusion of Bertha in family events caused Mother, who had always referred to all us children as "Bunnies", to at one point refer to her as "Bertha Bunny" ----- prompting a shocked & exasperated Penn to yell "Bertha can't be a bunny. We're the bunnies!!!!" Mom quickly replied "Okay, then; she's Bertha Bug." Hence, the character on the right side of the artwork, wearing a Bug, costume, is our long-time house maid Bertha who is steaming mad because she has been demoted from "Bunny" to "Bug". But Bertha's long and storied tenure in our home came to an abrupt end at what I called "Shoot-Out At The Blackledge Kitchen." Bertha had told Mother that she wanted to take off on June-Teenth Day, to celebrate the day when Texas slaves were freed. Mother said no. Neither woman would budge. An extraordinary loud exchange of words ensued, which concluded with Bertha grabbing her belongings (Mother would not let her take the paper bag of

Blackledge left-overs which she usually took home), storming out of our house, and never returning. The result was a series of replacement maids. To me, the two most colorful were "Glass Eye" (my name for her, because she had a habit of taking out her glass eye during the day because it bothered her, & I would round a corner of our house to find said eye staring up at me from a dish or tabletop), and "Crazy Annie". "Crazy Annie", while washing dishes at the sink, would carry on conversations with "The Cat Man" (apparently a close relation of Satan), whom she would explain to me had materialized on the drainboard to thrash his tail and hurl insults at her. The most amazing exploit of Crazy Annie was when she was arrested for loading her revolver on a Houston public bus. Dad received a call from the Houston jail where CA had been incarcerated, with CA pleading "Cap, you gotta come bail me out" ..... which Dad kindly did.

- At the top of the artwork is a sparrow, furiously flying. Our family would at times play pantomime games on the porch. One such time, Mother came down from her bedroom cloister to participate. We picked two-person teams, which resulted in Dad obligingly picking Mother as his partner. Mother was giving clues for her word to Dad. Mother was extraordinarily animated, running back & forth, left to right, seeming to be flapping her wings. Dad guessed every conceivable word, but couldn't get the correct word. Finally, with time up, Dad said "Missy, I'm so sorry, but I can't guess the word that you were trying to act out. What is the word. Mother, very exasperated that Dad had not guessed what she felt was the obvious word from her descriptive actions, pointedly said to Dad "Allan, the word is "Blizzard"!!! How could you not get that?!!!!". To which Dad, now incredulous, replied "But Missy, how do I get "Blizzard" from what you were acting out?" To which Mother firmly stated "I was being a sparrow!!! Can't you just imagine a little sparrow flying through a blizzard?"----- Say Goodnight Gracie -----

From  
"What The Hell?"  
to  
"Hail To The Chief"

In 1973, I was a young Navy Lieutenant serving aboard the cruiser USS Albany (CG-10). One of my shipmates was David Eisenhower, the grandson of former President Dwight Eisenhower and the Son-In-Law of then-current-President Richard Nixon. I had been fortunate to get to know David's delightful wife Julie Nixon Eisenhower (the daughter of then-President Richard Nixon) when she joined the other wives of Albany shipmates in following Albany from port-to-port during our 6 month Mediterranean cruise. I also had gotten to know the very intelligent David

Eisenhower very well during our long philosophical conversations while we were standing watches together in Albany's Combat Information Center. When Albany returned to our home base of Mayport, Florida at the conclusion of our 6-month Mediterranean deployment, I was put in charge of the ship while the Commanding Officer (CO) and most of the other ship's officers & crew went ashore. (My having been the youngest officer in Albany history to qualify as Command Duty Officer (CDO) ----- which meant I had qualified to be in charge of the ship ----- had been an accomplishment of which I had been very proud. But the downside was that, as the most junior Albany CDO, I was stuck with the duty of being in charge of the ship while the C.O. and most of USS Albany's other officers and crew were able to leave the ship & celebrate our being back in the U.S. after 6 months). Early the next morning, David came to my stateroom and said "Pete, I didn't want to tell the C.O, this, because he would have forced the crew to stay aboard to paint/prepare Albany ----- but my father-in-law, President Nixon, is flying down for a surprise tour of Albany today to see where I work." Yikes!!! To suddenly be told that the Commander-In-Chief is coming to tour the ship I'm in charge of was quite a shock! Sure enough, soon after David's advising me, there was Air Force One landing, and President Nixon along with Pat, Julie, Tricia, and a large throng of picture-snapping media arriving at the Albany gangway ---- all of them requesting permission from me (as CDO) to come aboard. Luckily, I had been able to get ahold of the C.O. in time for him to be there. Here is the advance media advisory which was sent to me (as CDO) and the official White House Photographer's picture of me (yep, that's me in the beard) receiving my Commander-In-Chief/President on *USS Albany's* quarterdeck! # Just Another Manic Monday.



## "The Perfect Date"

We never know when single personal action will provide someone with a lifetime treasured memory. When I was a senior at Lamar High School in Houston, Texas, a girl named Cheryl transferred into our class from Tyler ----- a small town in East Texas. As I talked with her after our Civics class, Cheryl painfully shared with me how difficult it was for her to make that transition. Her eyes would sparkle with excitement as she told me all about the beauty of Tyler, but then would mist over with sadness as she related how much she missed Tyler ---- the clear night sky, perfectly illuminated by a crescent moon and a thousand sparkling stars, with the sounds of the water lapping against the shore of Tyler Lake. She even missed Tyler's unique red dirt. I was so touched, and wanted to create a special memory to help her transition.

Cheryl, who subsequently became an award-winning, best-selling author and poet, later told me that she had won first place in a radio station call-in contest for "The Best Date Ever" by relating her account of that evening, and had additionally written several poems about that evening which were broadly published and a newspaper article published by The Houston Post about what she called "The Perfect Date." Here is part of what she wrote:

"I was just sixteen, and it was Saturday. I had a date with Pete that night and I was very excited. Pete was very popular, and the very first time I saw him he took my breath away when he smiled at me. This date turned out to be extraordinary from the start. When I opened the door, there was Pete ----- so tall and handsome ----- holding a dozen yellow roses. These were Tyler roses, "The Yellow Rose Of Texas", and my favorite. We said our good-byes to my Mom and Dad and we headed to his car ----- a beautiful black 1957 Chevy. As we neared the parking lot, Pete told me to close my eyes. He walked me around to the passenger side of the car, opened the door for me, and helped me into my seat. When he finally told me to open my eyes, I was awestruck by what I saw. Darn it, I'd just gotten the tears to stop from the roses, but when I saw the inside of his car I started to cry all over again. It took my breath away. There were over a hundred little silver stars stuck to the roof and a crescent shaped moon hung from the overhead light. There was Red Dirt on the floor, and pine cones and scattered needles. There was a miniature oil well derrick in the back and glitter all around to represent the silver star dust. He even had a tape recording of water washing up against the shore. He'd thought of everything. He was everything."

Cheryl told me that she had never felt so special as she did that night. And although our life paths diverged when I went off to the Naval Academy, we always maintained our close connection ----- and the memory of that special date never faded. She called me "Bars" after the Ensign & Lieutenant bars which I came to wear after my Naval Academy graduation, and I called her "Stars" after the beautiful Stars of Tyler's sky.

Almost fifty years later, I received a surprise special delivery package from Cheryl on Christmas Eve. Here are her words to describe what she had done to create that package:

"I special ordered a figurine from a Texas Treasure shop; it was an oil pump with a little crystal full of "Texas Black Gold" oil. My best friend Sue & I found a gift box in the shape of a Star, and then I found a larger gift box that was round and the Star Box fit perfectly into it. I bought a Match-Box Chevy car and scraped off the markings and painted it black. I found pencil drawings by a wonderful Texas artist; they were scenes from Texas history, and one had oil well derricks and a lake in it. I got pine cones, and pine needles and placed them in the star. I put red dirt in a small jar and placed it in the star. There were tiny silver stars in a container and Silver Star dust also placed in the star. I bought a miniature dozen yellow roses made of material and tied a green bow around them and placed them with the other treasures. There was a small oil well derrick and a crescent moon too. I



placed everything in the Star Box and secured it snugly in the round box, and then wrapped them to mail to Pete. I had it marked with explicit directions to deliver only on Christmas Eve. "

This touching gift, delivered a half century after our first "Perfect Date", provided memories for yet another published article which was written by author Cheryl: "The Story Of Silver Stars and Military Bars". Our amazing bond continues, and I was so honored when she formally dedicated her second book to me.

*Sent from my iPhone June 2017*